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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KYIV 000208

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SUBJECT: TYMOSHENKO SURGE: APPEAL OF "THE LESSER EVIL"

Classified By: Political Counselor Colin Cleary. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) The late surge in support for PM Tymoshenko, which made the February 7 second round presidential election results closer than many observers expected, reflected more an anti-Yanukovich vote than a pro-Tymoshenko one. Yanukovich's refusal to debate Tymoshenko, over confidence among his supporters, and last minute "lesser of two evils" calculations among Orange-inclined voters worked to Tymoshenko's advantage. End Summary.

Higher Than Expected Turnout in the West

2. (SBU) Turnout in Western Ukraine, at 70.8% during the second round of Presidential voting February 7, was more than ten points higher than Yanukovich's senior campaign advisors told us they had expected. They anticipated turnout in the West would go down following the first round -- but it went up. In Ternopil, Yanukovich won 9,764 fewer votes than in round one, while Tymoshenko won 368,983 votes more than she had in the oblast in round one. In Lviv, Tymoshenko increased her vote totals between rounds by a larger amount (770,877) than Yanukovich did in Donetsk (580,697), despite the fact that Lviv has only about half the population.

3. (SBU) These shifts tightened the race. Regions' pollsters had told us that they expected about a 12% victory margin (some went as high as 15%). The worst case scenario, they insisted, could not be below six percent. The final result turned out to be a margin of victory for Yanukovich of only 3.5%.

What Happened?

4. (C) Tymoshenko succeeded in mobilizing her Western Orange base between rounds, aided by Yanukovich's missteps. The following issues/events during that last week helped encourage Orange-inclined voters to turn out:

--No Show for Debate: Oleh Rybachyuk, former Head of the Presidential Secretariat under Yushchenko, highlighted to us the significance of Yanukovich's failure to appear to debate Tymoshenko on the Monday before the second round. It gave Tymoshenko ninety minutes on national TV to point at the empty podium on the other side. The empty podium, she stressed, epitomized that Yanukovich had nothing to offer, that he was afraid to confront her, and that he was the puppet of oligarchs. It also, she asserted, denied voters the right to evaluate the candidates in direct competition with each other.

--Overconfidence of Yanukovich team: Political Analysts such as PENTA director Volodymyr Fesenko told us that the arrogance of the Yanukovich team incited Western Ukrainian

voters to turn out in opposition. Regions spokesmen were conducting themselves, Fesenko said, as if Yanukovych had already won. They dropped their guard and let spokesmen who evoke "Donetsk Mafia" imagery get too much media exposure. Regions even let the Central Election Commission (CEC) Chairman from the fraudulent 2004 election appear as a Regions election expert. Fesenko noted that Regions' holding of a concert on the Friday before the second round smacked of triumphalism. (Tymoshenko, by contrast, held a prayer vigil.)

--Last Minute Legislation in Parliament: Tymoshenko successfully portrayed Regions' changing of the election law days before the second round as reminiscent of Regions' 2004 election manipulation. While Tymoshenko greatly exaggerated the negative impact (indeed the NGO OPORA praised the law), her efforts to cast doubts on Regions' intentions and tactics appear to have worked.

-Anton Chekhov a "Ukrainian poet": Tymoshenko's campaign trumpeted this statement by Yanukovych to paint him as an ignorant fool who would embarrass Ukraine. She poked fun in her speeches at other such Yanukovych-isms.

--Orange Legacy: Yanukovych said he would deliver Ukraine from the "Orange nightmare." Such comments served to motivate disaffected Orange voters, who believe in Orange ideals but were fed up with Tymoshenko, to vote for her.

--The Communists announced they were for Yanukovych.

--In short: many disaffected but Orange-inclined voters

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accepted -- as Tymoshenko urged them to accept -- the argument that staying home out of frustration with her was a vote for Yanukovych.

Tymoshenko's Appeal to Western Ukraine Mindset

15. (C) Head of the local NGO OPORA, Olga Ajvazovska, described to us the difference in mentalities between central Ukrainians and western Ukrainians. Those who live in Central Ukraine, she said, are more pragmatic. They were okay voting "against all" or staying home and felt that this was an appropriate way to express their displeasure with the failures of the Orange Revolution and, thus, Tymoshenko. This trend was apparent in the higher than average vote "against all" in Kyiv oblast, which was close to 9% (about 11% in the city).

16. (C) Ajvazovska characterized western Ukrainians as more idealistic and religious. Tymoshenko appealed to their fears about Yanukovych and convinced them that staying at home or voting against all was tantamount to handing him the presidency. In addition, Tymoshenko skillfully appealed to western Ukraine's religious faith. She met with leaders of all faiths. Observers on the ground reported that many Greek Catholic priests delivered instructions from the pulpit on election day (a Sunday) that incited their parishioners to go to the polls. Ajvazovska believes that Yanukovych's advisors underestimated the depth of western Ukraine's strong sense of identity. Tymoshenko's appeal to Ukrainian symbols paid off.

Comment: From "Our Yuliya" to "Lesser of Two Evils"

17. (C) For many disaffected Orange voters, Tymoshenko had shifted in five years from being "Our Yuliya" to being "the lesser of two evils." Nonetheless, a combination of Tymoshenko's appeals and Regions' mistakes helped encourage such voters to turn out. The race could have tightened even further had Yushchenko not exhorted his supporters to vote "against all." In the second round, Tymoshenko's revived

her reputation as a strong finisher. Despite the burdens of being sitting PM at a time of -15% GDP contraction and the legacy of her infighting with Yushchenko, Tymoshenko was able to gain ground, coming closer than many, especially in Regions, had expected.

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